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AN AGE OF ACADEMIC COOPERATION.

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DRAWING UPON HIS EXTENSIVE EXPERIENCE AS CHANCELLOR OF THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, WITH ITS 68 CAMPUSES AND 138,000 FULL-TIME STUDENTS, THE AUTHOR DEFINES THE MAJOR ISSUES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN A MULTICAMPUS UNIVERSITY SETTING. INCREASING INSTITUTIONAL SPECIALIZATION MEANS THAT COOPERATION AND COORDINATION WITHIN A GROUP OF GEOGRAPHICALLY RELATED COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES, PRIVATE AS WELL AS PUBLIC, ARE NECESSARY IF THE OBJECTIVES OF A TOP QUALITY COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM OF HIGHER EDUCATION ARE TO BE REALIZED. WITHIN A STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM HAVING A CENTRALIZED ADMINISTRATION FOR ALL MEMBER INSTITUTIONS, INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS CAN MAKE THEIR GREATEST CONTRIBUTION BY BEING GRANTED THE HIGHEST POSSIBLE DEGREE OF LOCAL AUTONOMY TO DEVELOP THEIR ACADEMIC SPECIALITIES AND CAMPUS LIFE PROGRAMS FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL CONCERNED. OPERATIONS THAT SHOULD BE LEFT PRIMARILY TO THE AUTONOMOUS DECISION OF INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTIONS INCLUDE EXPENDITURE OF BUDGETED FUNDS, CAMPUS ORGANIZATION, FACULTY RECRUITMENT, DETERMINATION OF CAMPUS OBJECTIVES, AND PHYSICAL FACILITIES PLANNING. PROBLEMS INCLUDE THE INCLINATION OF LOCAL ADMINISTRATORS TO ASCRIBE PROBLEMS TO CENTRAL OFFICE EDICTS RATHER THAN TO LOCAL ACTION OR INACTION, AND THE FAILURE OF LOCAL ADMINISTRATORS TO DELEGATE AUTHORITY TO SUBORDINATES IN THEIR OWN ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE. THIS ADDRESS WAS DELIVERED TO THE ASSOCIATION OF STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (COLUMBUS, OHIO, NOVEMBER 13, 1967). (JK)

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AN AGE OF ACADEMIC COOPERATION

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Delivered at
Association of State
Colleges and Universities
Columbus, Ohio
November 13, 1967

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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An Age of Academic Cooperation

I.

You are most kind in asking me to join you tonight to speak on questions of academic cooperation and autonomy. Your kindness is all the more appreciated since I represent the youngest major public university in the United States. We at State University of New York have all your problems, I am sure, but in addition we have many peculiar to ourselves, not the least of which are those attributable to our youth. And when you remember that we are working with such problems within the framework of an institution less than twenty years old that encompasses all the levels of higher education from professional schools to community colleges, that presently has 138,000 full-time students, 68 campuses and centers, more than 15,000 faculty and staff members plus another 15,000 employees, a current operating budget of $300,000,000 and a construction budget calling for the expenditure of $3,200,000,000 by 1975 (I shall spare you any extrapolation of our estimate for the very long-range future)--when you remember these elements and have recovered from your sense of horror, you will understand at least one reason why I was invited to speak on this occasion.

I am here primarily, I suppose, to provide a therapeutic effect, to cause each of you to feel that with all your own inevitable difficulties, you can look in my direction and see that the grass is not only no greener there, but that it is growing with a rampant disregard for many of our traditionally cultivated, orderly, well-pruned academic groves.

University presidents need this kind of reassurance from time to time. My own comes from the belief that the youth and size and structure of the State University of New York make it the greatest single laboratory of higher education in this country and therefore add to the fascination of the task even as it becomes steadily more complicated and difficult. It comes also from the belief that the State University of New York represents in a very broad sort of way the pattern of the future. This is quite apart from our nostalgic desires which may be quite different. And it is this pattern of the future that I should like to examine with you briefly.

II.

Universities are described and defined in many ways and from many points of view. They are repositories of accumulated knowledge; they are disseminators of that knowledge; they are searchers after new knowledge and try mightily to move closer to truth; they are prognosticators of change and sometimes they help such change take place; they are critics of society; they are diverse and multipurpose; they are communities of scholars; they are strange amalgams of the timeless and timely; they are bulwarks in the

protection of independent thought; they are agencies of service; they are encouragers of the cultural and aesthetically satisfying elements of life. These are some of the more positive characteristics attributed to them by those who see clearly how vital they are in preserving and enhancing our civilization.

There are those who see other characteristics in universities, puzzling and not so positive or attractive. Some critics see them as essentially conservative institutions, almost ponderous in their movements toward change and lagging behind contemporary necessities to the point of irrelevancy; as supermarkets with a bewildering and unbelievably diffuse array of packaged knowledge, a good deal of which is hermetically sealed off from reality; as horrendous octopi crushing themselves and all who come near in their bureaucratic tentacles; as havens for unregenerated youth escaping from responsibility and as headquarters for the development of professional athletes; as unreasonable and unnecessary drains upon the public and private purse; as hotbeds of radicalism and revolutionary tendencies; as impersonal enterprises concentrating their efforts upon the values of materialism, mediocrity, and uniformity.

All these characterizations, pro and con, could be found to be true somewhere in the great assemblies of institutions of higher education in this country, I suppose. Setting these aside, however, with no more than a recognition that such images exist in true or distorted fashion, let us turn our

attention to the one image that is becoming increasingly clear, the image of interdependent institutions, a rather new phenomenon but one which becomes mandatory under present and future circumstances. It is an image or concept that encompasses separate and differing types of institutions, that promises a unity of many parts within a single system, and that reaches into the individual campus and how it is to be planned and administered.

It is unnecessary for me to list or describe for you the many examples of formal and informal associations among private colleges or public universities. You know them as well as I do. Such organizations as the Association of Midwest Colleges or the Big Ten universities are typical. They represent a movement that will grow steadily for the simple reason that it provides economic and academic strength which the single institution could not develop by itself.

This is particularly true in these days when the elements of instruction and research include so many new devices that are extraordinarily expensive to purchase and maintain. There is sound logic in the policy of pooling scientific equipment or library or computer or radio and television resources, for example. There is even sound logic in the coordinated use of faculty and the avoidance of curricular duplication wherever desirable. As this movement progresses, I would predict that public and private institutions will come together more and more in such a sharing within whatever legal bounds any state may choose to establish.

It is also unnecessary for me to comment upon the new emphases now being given to planning and coordination in so many parts of the country. There is great need for such planning and coordination as the responsibilities of higher education expand. There are also latent dangers which are being forgotten or ignored in the present enthusiasm evident for superboards and coordinating councils.

Unquestionably higher education can be made more efficient, more orderly, and more economical through a coordinated approach although the bureaucratic tendencies such a system will encourage are rather frightening to consider. But whether this planning and coordinating process on the grand scale will sufficiently protect the creative and independent needs and aspirations of any single institution within the system remains to be seen. It is possible that such an institution will soon find itself being told by some higher authority removed at considerable distance from it what it may or may not do.

When we recognize that such dangers exist even within multicampus universities, we see readily how they are multiplied and intensified when all colleges and universities are put into such a coordinated structure. Only by the most sensitive attention to institutional independence and diversity on the part of those responsible shall we be able to avoid a great movement toward educational uniformity and a deadening of the competitive spirit. As a sidelight, it is noteworthy to point out that other countries where the

highest degree of centralization has been traditional (France, for example) are now exploring ways to develop their institutions along more independent lines and to eliminate or deemphasize the central hierarchy so characteristic of them in the past.

The multicampus university itself and what takes place administratively on any campus of such a university are the two major aspects I should like to explore with you, however. It seems to me that these are basic to an examination of the future directions of higher education unless a broader system of coordination and planning takes away all initiative and makes administrative clerks of us all.

One might argue at the very outset that the mere creation of the multicampus university presupposes all the same potential dangers I have attributed to a broader system of coordination. This I would readily admit, although there is a very major difference. Regardless of the number of its campuses, a university both in theory and in fact, has an entity of its own, a table of objectives agreed upon to which each campus contributes its own individual strength and power. As an institution, furthermore, it is knit together by ties of personal and professional association, by the action and interaction of faculties and students, by physical images and intellectual interplay, all of which go far beyond any administrative convenience. Yet, the dangers are present, and they must be recognized and counteracted.

They all stem from the same source, namely, the temptation of creating a monolithic structure, totalitarian in approach, with campuses as mere satellites of a central administration.

There is little point in decrying or bewailing the emergence of the multicampus university; it is a phenomenon of modern educational life, and it is here to stay for the foreseeable future. We must therefore learn to live with such a phenomenon and consider what opportunities it presents in the midst of its inevitability. In actuality it is not necessarily the ugly ogre some would make of it. How successfully it meets academic needs depends not upon its size and complexity but upon the kind of philosophy with which it is organized internally. Indeed, I would submit that the very complexity and diversity of such a university provide the basis for a large degree of independent campus thinking, planning, and operation. If local autonomy is accepted and agreed upon as the philosophy guiding the administrative and academic direction of the multicampus university, such autonomy can be achieved, given the proper circumstances for cultivating and refining it.

Even as I say this, I must hasten to admit that my own institution has not yet completely reached such a point of development. But it is on its way toward local autonomy, and it is on its way purposefully. We are far enough along the road to see not only the efficacy of such a philosophy but the

absolute necessity for it. I am convinced that in today's setting there is no other way to bring about change that will be accepted and will be lasting. There is no other way, also, if one wishes to have campuses fashioned in a variety of forms, with a variety of missions, and with a keen sense of their own involvement in working toward their predetermined goals.

Of course, one of the main difficulties is that of identifying the areas of local autonomy. When one considers the vast array of individual items of administrative and academic decision, it is obvious that to separate these into matters of general policy and those of local control is no small task. In certain instances, also, there is an interplay between the two such as in the creation of budgets and expenditure of funds, for example. In other instances there are legal considerations, such as restrictions established by state statute which carefully limit the autonomy of the university as a whole and thus make it impossible for local autonomy to be granted. In my own State an illustration would be the stipulation of preaudit procedures by the Comptroller which naturally rules out certain possibilities for independent decision and action by the individual campuses as well as for the total University.

Still another problem arises out of identifying the specifics of local autonomy, a strange problem that seems to stem from rather mysterious psychological roots. The mere process of codifying the areas of locally autonomous action seems to cause a reaction of protest even though more

independence is granted by the new code. This is similar to what happens whenever regulations are formalized for students, regulations which may give them more freedom than they have had hitherto. For some reason there is resistance to seeing the rules clearly set forth on paper; the preference seems to be for a comforting kind of vagueness. Nor does this reaction disappear completely even after much patient explanation and reassurance.

Yet, there must be some sort of agreement, formal or informal, between the central administration and the separate campuses that gives at least relatively clear indications of where authority has been delegated. A clue to the solution of this problem lies in the degree of proliferation of all-university policies promulgated by the board of trustees. In similar fashion to our federal Constitution, rights not specifically reserved to the central administration under such policies can be interpreted as belonging to the individual campuses. And it therefore becomes important for the educational leadership to guide the board of trustees to the exercise of restraint in establishing general policies.

Perhaps I should illustrate this point more specifically to show how such a pattern of division of responsibility operates. I have consistently urged, within our own University, that the Board of Trustees promulgate no general policy relating to permissions for students to have

alcoholic beverages on campuses, and the Trustees have thus far agreed. Such a matter has therefore been the responsibility of each campus to examine according to its own traditions, the make-up of its population, the nature of the community in which it resides, and similar factors. The result has been a wide variety of campus decisions: some have ignored the question completely, finding no great wave of desire on the part of the students for the introduction of alcoholic beverages into campus life: some have adopted policies which differ widely according to local circumstances; the emphasis in all cases has been upon mature, responsible deliberation with all segments of interest represented in the discussions. (And may I say parenthetically that thus far our dealing with this issue squarely and realistically has engendered better results than the traditional policy of a flat overall denial of privilege and then a turning away of the head every time the policy is flouted.)

In contrast to this illustration of local autonomy, let me cite one of University policy where it seems essential to us that we have a central control. Determining a general policy on married student and faculty housing is essential, we believe, because the funds to be used for the provision of such facilities come from a central source. It is still the prerogative of the local campus to decide whether it needs such housing and how much, but it proceeds with its planning in direct coordination with the central staff.

I could mention many other aspects of university life where local autonomy can and does operate successfully. In budgeting, once a total budget for a campus has been agreed upon, the responsibility for expending the funds is that of the local campus, with a maximum of flexibility within the lump sum. The organization of campuses is a local matter: within the State University of New York there are many forms of campus organization, all developed locally. The University at Buffalo is organized into seven major faculties, each with its own provost; the University at Stony Brook is organized into fifteen small colleges, each with its residential and instructional aspects; four of the arts and science colleges have formed a consortium and are exploring many cooperative and coordinated ventures; some campuses have departmental structures, others have divisional ones. The important point is that all these patterns have emerged through local decision, not by central fiat. Faculty recruitment is similarly a local matter to a large extent. Only certain types or levels of positions require the approval of the Chancellor and in some cases, of the Board. The function of the central staff is to assist the campus whenever needed and called upon, and to encourage campuses to search for the highest quality of personnel. The determination of campus objectives is likewise a local responsibility within the broad guidelines of the Board, which are designed to assure that the needs of the State will be appropriately met and that undue duplication will not occur. The master planning process, directed

through central staff, regularly offers each campus the opportunity to present a case for the changing of its objectives or its mission as it sees ways by which it can contribute in new ways to the total responsibility of the University.

Student affairs are developed in whatever way the campus chooses, with the Board of Trustees establishing a policy that stipulates the ways students must be protected by due process in disciplinary matters. The policy also urges a high degree of student involvement in the formation of the academic and social patterns of campus life. Under this broad stipulation many patterns of student organization are emerging with increasing degrees of student involvement, more rapidly on some campuses than on others, but with the pressures for more involvement coming from local sources. The same comment could be made about faculty participation in academic planning or budget building or matters of recruitment, promotion, and tenure. Physical facilities planning is another major area in which local autonomy has a role to play; here I should say quite candidly that we have not yet refined our procedures to the point where either the local campus or the central administration is satisfied with present relationships. But improvement is evident, and we are continuing to explore how the local campus may have its appropriate share of responsibility without any slackening of the pace at which the physical growth of the University must of necessity proceed.

There are other examples I could cite, but perhaps these are sufficiently representative. I hope you will forgive me for drawing so copiously upon our experience at the State University of New York; it is, after all, the institution I know best. And let me assure you that we have by no means solved all the problems of local autonomy and decentralization; we are simply working at them assiduously and with a determination that they shall be solved.

III.

The multicampus university has many other fascinating and puzzling characteristics which I wish there were time to explore tonight. But in the interests of your courtesy and patience, let me mention only two before concluding.

It must be realized that the opportunity to shift blame or, to put it another way, the difficulty in precisely fixing responsibility increases in about the same proportion as the institution itself increases in size. Think how this opportunity grows still more when the institution has many campuses, geographically at considerable distance from the central headquarters. Then, add to this the natural image of the central staff as a species of shadowy, impersonal bureaucracy with all the concomitant implications of vast amounts of paper work or extraordinary numbers of committees and conferences, all helping to create a pattern of unreasonable

interference, and you begin to see the picture more clearly. When problems arise on a campus, there is an almost irresistible temptation for local administrators to take refuge in emphasizing that they stem from unchallengeable central office edicts rather than from whatever has or has not been done locally. There is also a tendency to take whatever rules exist, such as, for example, those relating to financial matters, and to apply them with an arbitrariness and inflexibility that eliminate common sense and extenuating circumstances completely. Some sort of psychological satisfaction accrues from this, no doubt, in addition to a sense of escape. There is also a certain sense of safety in having another authority convenient but geographically distant to whom one can always allude with a certain tone of mystery or with the use of the indefinite "they," who are regularly the archvillains of the piece. In our own case at the State University of New York, the almost magically pejorative word is "Albany," since this is where the central headquarters are located.

This human frailty is amusing sometimes, but it is more often exasperating since it adds to the already huge bulk of protest mail and necessitates the use of much staff time sorely needed for more important matters. Furthermore, it requires diplomacy of a high order, since the various constituencies of the University must be given appropriate and accurate answers which at the same time will not be an embarrassment to local campuses. Occasionally, of course, it will reveal rules

or customs which ought to be changed or done away with, and thus can have a beneficial effect. In the main, however, it is a by-product of efforts toward decentralization which will probably never be wholly eliminated.

Finally, there is the problem of convincing local leadership that it, too, should delegate authority and encourage involvement of others in the decision-making process just as it expects and even demands such delegation from above. This problem varies from campus to campus and depends to a certain extent upon how local leadership defines delegation and involvement. The establishment of appropriate communications with faculty, students, and with the community is a vital aspect of campus growth; beyond this, however, the creation of an atmosphere of frank appraisal of academic and physical changes that seem imminent, of involvement in the process of developing plans and crystallizing new aspirations, of calling upon the expertise which each component of the campus and community has to offer--this is even more vital if tensions and frictions and misunderstandings are to be kept to a minimum. There can never be complete and unqualified success in every instance, but a general attitude of mutual trust and sharing, once created as characteristic of the campus, is a priceless basis for progress.

The disquieting but inevitable result of delegation of authority and of encouraging a large amount of involvement by others, whether one thinks of the total university or of a single campus, is that those who are the recipients of this opportunity become more and more preoccupied with the authority and involvement still denied to them, rather than with what they already have. This is human nature, to be sure, but it is a strong argument in the hands of those who oppose local autonomy of any real sort. They point out, perhaps tritely but quite accurately, that the more one gets, the more one wants and expects. Past victories mean nothing; it is only future ones that count. Campuses can become hotbeds of campaigning for more and more of a voice in whatever goes on until ultimately the leadership is a captive of the constituencies, whether faculty or student or both.

In spite of this, however, I am convinced that the multicampus university must accept the risk and function on the basis of locally autonomous units. In my view this will bring one closer to the emergence of the campuses as a varied group of institutions, working out a great part of their own destinies, helping to shape their structure and organization, and assuming responsibility for many vital elements of their growth. I would rather struggle with the tensions and the abrasiveness caused by local autonomy than with those brought about by central authoritarianism.

Indeed, it appears to me that the latter possibility is less and less practical in these times; it could even be devastatingly destructive.

The motto of the State University of New York is a simple one: "Let Each Become All He Is Capable of Being." One could modify this somewhat and say, "Let Each Campus Become All It Is Capable of Being." It would reflect our conviction that, through our assiduous efforts toward interdependence, cooperation, and local autonomy, this modified motto can someday summarize our achievements and thus lead to better realization of the promise we cherish for every student.